Cop martyred; PHC driver recovered in Bannu

By Our Correspondent

BANNU: A policeman was martyred during an exchange of fire between the Ahmadzai subdivision police and terrorists in the Metaki Beizankhel Taziri area of Bannu.

Police identified the deceased as Sadam Hussain. Heavy weapons were also used by both the sides, creating panic and fear in the area.

The exchange of fire continued for some time. A heavy contingent of police, along with armoured personnel carriers, was dispatched to the scene.

The funeral prayers of the deceased were held at the Bannu Police Lines.

Meanwhile, two boys suffered injuries when a toy-like object they were playing with went off in Bodeenkhel area of Domel here on Wednesday.

The injured boys were identified as Amir, resident of Kaleem Khan Kallay, and Umar Zaib, resident of Ghanikhel in Domel. Both the boys were aged between 12 and 13 years.

Sources said the boys found a toy-like suspicious object on Bodeenkhel Road.

As soon as they picked it up and started playing with, it exploded with a bang, causing severe injuries to both.

A Rescue 1122 team shifted the injured to Khalifa Gul Nawaz Hospital, Bannu.

In another development, the police claimed that driver of the Peshawar High Court's Bannu Bench deputy registrar, who was abducted a couple of days ago, was safely recovered on Wednesday.

Terrorists abducted four civilians along with a vehicle in Domel Sperka Chowk.

Later, three individuals were released, but Arif, the judicial officer's driver, remained in the terrorists' captivity.

A statement said a special police team was formed, which launched a search and strike operation, during which terrorists were forced to flee after abandoning the man.

Eight injured in Mirali quadcopter attack

By Our Correspondent

NORTH WAZIRISTAN: Eight people, including three children, were injured in a quadcopter attack in Mirali subdivision of North Waziristan district on Wednesday.

Local residents said explosive material dropped from the drone struck a residential locality, injuring several civilians.

The wounded were immediately shifted to Mirali Hospital, while some critically injured victims were later referred to Bannu Hospital for further treatment.

Locals said the attack occurred in the broad daylight, triggering anger and anxiety among residents.

"We are already living under constant fear and insecurity. Drone attacks are now targeting children and innocent civilians – when will the government provide us protection," asked a local elder, Abdul Jalil, while speaking to Dawn.

Another resident, Latif Khan, said such recurring incidents had paralysed life in the area.

"Children are afraid to go to school, and the public is suffering from severe mental stress," he added.

Similar quadcopter and drone attacks have previously been reported in various areas, particularly in Mirali and Miranshah, targeting civilians, children and government installations.

A few weeks ago, a drone attack on a private educational institution injured teachers and students.

Reports of drone surveillance and explosions have also surfaced from different localities in the past.

Police said an investigation into the incident had been launched.

STUDENTS from Zamung Kor organisation participate in a martial arts competition at the opening ceremony of a sports festival organised by the KP sports department in Peshawar on Wednesday. — White Star

PHC reserves order on petitions against ban on PTM, its leaders

Petitioners term movement non-violent, govt's move illegal

Bureau Report

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court on Wednesday reserved its order over pleas against placing ban on Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) and several of its leaders including its chief Manzoor Ahmad Pashteen by the government in 2024.

A bench consisting of Justice Sahibzada Asadullah and Justice Dr Khurshid Iqbal heard detailed arguments advanced by lawyers representing the petitioners as well as that of the additional attorney general, Sanaullah, in support of their contentions.

Early this month, the AAG had submitted a sealed report to the court stating that it included sensitive information and was for the perusal of court. The bench was hearing two almost identical petitions.

One of the petition was jointly filed by Manzoor Pashteen and nine other leaders, requesting the court to declare illegal ban on PTM under Section 11B of Anti-Terrorism Act and the petitioners under Section 11-EE.

The petitioners have sought court's orders for federal government to remove PTM from the list of banned outfits in First Schedule of ATA and their names from the ATA's Fourth Schedule.

They also requested the court to declare that sections 11-B and 11-EE, amended through Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Act, 2014, were in conflict with Article 10-A of the Constitution that guaranteed the right to fair trial and due process of law.

The petitioners have sought orders for Section 11-D of the law, which deals with keeping of an organisation under observation, to be read as a mandatory precursor to proscription under Section 11-B.

The other petition was filed by a member of PTM, Masoom Shah, requesting the court to declare the Oct 6, 2024, notification of the ministry of interior about proscribing the movement as illegal.

AAG Sanaullah contended that those petitions were not maintainable and were liable to be dismissed.

He argued that statutory provisions were available to petitioners in terms of Section 11-C of Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997, by filing a review application in writing in the first instance before the federal government through ministry of interior against the impugned notification, whereby PTM was declared a proscribed organisation.

He said that in the second instance the petitioners could file an appeal before the high court against refusal of their review application. He claimed that PTM leaders were involved in anti-stated activities as they were delivering hate speeches in their meetings against Pakistan.

He questioned as to why PTM was not registering itself with Election Commission of Pakistan if it called itself a political organisation.

Advocates Attaullah Kundi, Jehanzeb Mehsud and Shah Mohammad appeared for the petitioners and said that PTM was a civil and non-violent social movement that had been advocating for the rights of Pakhtuns since its formation in 2014.

They said that unlike violent or militant movements in the region, PTM had drawn inspiration from advocate of non-violence Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and consistently stood against violence.

Mr Kundi said that PTM organised Pashtun National Jirga from Oct 11 to Oct 13, 2024, in Khyber tribal district to provide a platform to Pakhtuns to demand 'justice and accountability'.

However, he said that to the utter shock of the petitioners, federal government issued the impugned notification on Oct 6, 2024, to ban PTM, while the petitioners and several other leaders of the organisation were 'proscribed' under Section 11-EE with their names placed in Fourth Schedule of ATA.

He contended that PTM didn't require registration with ECP as it was a movement and not a political party. He contended that federal government banned PTM, claiming that federal cabinet approved it, but it neither made the cabinet's decision public nor it shared the grounds for ban with his clients.

The lawyer argued that a 2014 amendment to ATA empowered government to ban an organisation on ex parte basis without providing an opportunity of hearing to it, but that provision was unconstitutional and against the principle of natural justice.

He said that from the very beginning, they had been demanding that they should be informed about the grounds for proscription of the organisation, but the government had not been giving them any information in that regard.

JI chief opposes fresh military operation

Questions resettlement of militants in region

Bureau Report

PESHAWAR: Jamaat-i-Islami emir Hafiz Naeemur Rehman on Wednesday opposed a fresh military action against militants, saying the past military operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan didn't yield results.

"The outcome of previous military operations should be examined before the launch of fresh military operations,"Mr Rehman told reporters here.

He complained that military operations displaced people and caused collateral damage.

The JI emir said that people were troubled by displacement in the intense cold.

"Imagine the misery of people when they're asked to leave their homes at midnight," he said.

Mr Rehman said the families hosting displaced persons also faced issues.

He said that the agreement, signed between the government and the 24-member committee, should be immediately implemented, and that people should be compensated for their destroyed structures and resettled within the promised time.

The JI emir also raised questions about the resettlement of militants in the region despite the presence of security forces.

He urged Chief Minister Sohail Afridi to focus on the development of KP while fulfilling his party's responsibilities.

Mr Rehman insisted that CM Afridi opposed military operations but the administration working under him had been signing agreements.

"You [CM] cannot exonerate yourself by saying the military operations are being carried out against your will," he said.

The JI chief accused the federal government of ignoring the issues facing displaced people.

He urged the federal government to hold meaningful talks with Afghanistan and resolve issues, saying people suffer from conflicts.

"Only the enemy is benefitting from the current Pak-Afghan tensions," he said.

Mr Rehman said that the Taliban regime must ensure that the Afghan soil isn't used against Pakistan, while Islamabad should try to normalise relations with Kabul.

He requested the leadership of both countries to resolve all issues through dialogue.

The JI emir, however, said before negotiations were held, Pakistan and Afghanistan should reopen bilateral trade routes to the relief of traders, farmers and many others, who were badly hit by the prolonged border closure.

He said that hundreds of Pakistani students were stranded on the other side of the border due to tensions.

Mr Rehman urged the federal government to ensure early yet safe homecoming of those students.

He also advocated for a local government system and said only local governments could resolve people's issues at grassroots level.

The JI chief called for strengthening the LG system and opposed any extension in the tenure of the current local bodies in the province.

He said the local body elections should be held on time.

Mr Rehman also criticised the PPP government in Sindh over deaths in the Karachi shopping plaza fire and complained that many people were still missing.

Minister's house attacked in Swat

By Our Correspondent

SWAT: Unidentified assailants carried out a hand grenade attack on the residence of provincial minister for housing Dr Amjad Ali here on Wednesday morning.

According to police, the incident occurred in the Shamozai area of Barikot tehsil.

"At the time of the attack, the provincial minister was not present at his residence. The explosion caused minor damage to the boundary wall of the house, while all family members remained safe," district police officer Mohammad Omar Khan said.

Security around the residence and nearby areas has been tightened as a precautionary measure. Authorities have stated that all possible angles are being examined, and further details will be shared once the investigation progresses.

Special assistant to chief minister on information and public relations, Shafi Jan, condemned the grenade attack on the residence of Dr Ali and termed it a cowardly act.

He said such acts could neither intimidate the provincial government nor dampen public resolve.

Displaced persons express reservations about Tirah military operation

Fear return of terrorists after completion of action

By Ibrahim Shinwari

KHYBER: With Tirah residents continuing to vacate houses, a number of displaced persons have expressed reservations about the planned military operation against militants in the restive valley here.

Many internally displaced persons told Dawn that militants fled the valley with the start of evacuation late Dec as security forces vowed to carry out a full-scale operation against militants in Tirah.

They said that residents were considered a 'shield' by terrorist groups operating in the valley as they would take refuge in houses in case of intelligence-based operations.

"Militants used to barge into houses both at night and in the daytime to demand meal and protection," a person displaced from Malakdinkhel told Dawn on arrival in Bara.

Requesting anonymity due to sensitivity of the matter, he said that though he didn't see militants move out of Tirah, his relatives and neighbours insisted that a number of armed men affiliated with proscribed groups suddenly "vanished" from their localities after residents began vacating their houses.

"I wonder who the security forces will launch a military operation against when terrorists have relocated to safer places in Tirah or outside," he said.

The IDP said that it would be wishful thinking on part of the operation planners to expect that militants would act as sitting ducks and wait for security forces to come and shoot them while residents were away.

"Militant groups have their own strategy and operate in accordance with a well thought-out strategy," he said.

TIRAH residents with their personal belongings loaded on trucks just before leaving the valley. — Dawn

The displaced person said security forces might find themselves groping in the dark after the evacuation was completed by the end of January while militants, too, would mostly go "underground".

He said that in the beginning, militants tried to stop residents from vacating their houses but when they failed, they started depriving them of valuable belongings, which even included textbooks and school certificates of students.

Taj Mohammad Kamarkhel, whose family was forced to vacate their house along with over 450 other families in November 2023, expressed doubts about the security forces completing the planned military operation by the end of April.

He said that when residents were ordered to leave houses and that, too, without giving them the status of IDP in November 2023, they were told that the operation would be concluded in three months' time and they would be allowed to return to their homes.

"Now it's over two years that we are left high and dry with no return plan in sight while the remaining Tirah families, too, are asked to leave their houses in this harsh winter," he lamented.

The IDP added that neither the conducting of the military operation nor its conclusion seemed a reality.

Accompanied by other displaced persons at a registration centre in Bara, he said the harsh Tirah winter could prove a "hurdle" to a full-fledged military operation as mobility of security forces could be hampered by intense cold weather.

Shabbir Ahmad, a young resident of Sarrai Kandao, believed that IBOs with the migration of residents would have been a better strategy to effectively tackle the monster of terrorism in Tirah while eliminating most terrorists with effective coordination and liaison with residents and minimising any chances of collateral damage.

He said that people of Tirah had little confidence in the success of the planned military operation as they feared that terrorists would re-enter the valley once the operation was completed and the IDPs were allowed to go back to their homes.

"The same happened in Upper Bara in 2022 when a majority of the returned families found their houses occupied in advance by the armed militants while they received little or no help from the government despite repeated appeals for safety," he said.